



News Release: Local Librarian Admits Lack of Information Can Hinder Progress

Despite three years of teaching Dewey to my elementary students, the same questions resurfaced each year, "Why are fairy tales in nonfiction? Aren't fairy tales make-believe?" "Why are fairy tales in the same section as the facts about holidays and government?" "Was Cinderella a real person?" "Is all poetry true since it's in nonfiction?" "Why are some computer books in the 100s, and some are way over in the 600s?" Students are so savvy, smart, and helpful. They helped me see my need for more study on library organization.

Help Me, Mr. Dewey!

To be more accurate, I realized I needed a clearer understanding of what Mr. Dewey had in mind when he devised his plan for organizing books and information in the library. I also needed a way to make my students identify with the importance of organization. Isn't it true that a teacher can only effectively teach what a teacher truly understands? This library media specialist realized she needed more information on Dewey's method of organization and an effective way to convey that information to students with varied interests and learning styles.

Understanding Dewey's plan for organizing all knowledge involves taking a journey back in time in America. After reading Wiegand's biography of Dewey, I was reacquainted with the fact that Melvil Dewey, teacher and librarian extraordinaire, born in New York in 1851, wanted to place all knowledge and subject matter into one of 10 categories. Within each of those 10 categories, he further divided knowledge more specifically over the

years of his career. While a student library assistant at Amherst College, he focused on simplification as he devised the "Dewey" way to organize information. Each book was assigned a number based on its subject matter, and as the number

Dewey was very opinionated as to what constituted a "good" book. The primary purpose of library books would have been to educate and inspire, rather than entertain. In the "Dewey" Day, any fiction books, which we denote "E" or "F" today, would most likely have been placed in the 800s or "in the back." Today we pull out fiction books and place them in their own sections for convenience sake. Many library media specialists use genre stickers to identify Mystery, Science Fiction, Historical Fiction, or Romance, or they use turkey stickers to suggest Thanksgiving and candy canes that point to Christmas. Some elementary library media centers even have an Easy Dewey (nonfiction) section for the K-3 students whose teachers direct them to find and read nonfiction.

"Each month, highlight a Dewey Section by pulling various books, doing short booktalks, and mentioning their relationships to one another."

of books increased, so did the length of the numbers, requiring the addition of the decimal point and tenths and hundredths. He requested copyright for his plan in 1876, enclosing \$1 with his written request. In his Classification System, 2nd edition, published in 1885, he had made several revisions, including the addition of American Literature. Most library books in a "Dewey" library would have been in the "nonfiction" informative category (Wiegand, 1996).

Melvil, May I Simplify a Little More?

My main point of emphasis for elementary students is that nonfiction library media center books are located with other books about the same subject. All the books that offer information are in the numbered sections (nonfiction). All the books that are the product of someone's imagination are in the "E" and "F" sections. I provide library media center maps and Dewey bookmarks for each student at the beginning of the school year.

I decided I would start all over



By Nancy Hogsett

and try to simplify the naming of Dewey's categories for the kid crowd of 2005. Most elementary students have no clue what the terms "social sciences" and "generalities" mean, much less "philology," which Dewey originally used for the 400s. I also inquired around my local school district to hear how other elementary library media specialists taught Dewey. There were quite a variety of methods. Many taught Dewey's system of library organization totally apart from fiction/nonfiction concepts. A few did not even teach Dewey, which I found horrifically inexcusable!

Lesson #1 in my revised teaching plan became "What Is a Library Media Center?" and "Why Organize the Library Media Center?" Picture a library media center table stacked high with many books of all sizes and shapes, audio books, videos, and magazines. I told my students that I was in a predicament (puzzling place). I told them that Mrs. Smith, the science teacher, had asked for some information and books on sharks. I knew there was

a shark book in that stack of books somewhere and I needed it right now for Mrs. Smith, who would be teaching about "animals that swim" tomorrow. I asked the fourth graders how we could find that shark book in three minutes. "Is looking through this monstrous, messy stack the only way?" I asked. "That will take a long time and I want that book right now and I know it's there." ARGH! Everyone agreed there has to be a better way to find what I need. Let the students think about how to solve the dilemma.

Punch and Cookies

Lesson #2 was a library media center table with a big punch bowl filled with forks, knives, spoons, plates, and cans of soup, beans, mustard, and napkins. I asked the students if this was how their kitchen at home was arranged. A lively discussion ensued with most students wanting to tell me that their mom or grandma kept the forks in one place, spoons in another, and the green beans were in a cabinet or on another shelf. I affirmed the effectiveness of

their home kitchen's organization and the convenience provided by order. "Isn't it nice to know exactly where the forks are when you need a fork?" They all agreed, though a couple said a spoon would do if the forks were all dirty or lost! One library media specialist said she uses clothing, such as jeans, shirts, socks, and sweaters all mixed and piled high in a laundry basket, taking her students on a visual journey while organizing like pieces of clothing together and pointing out how much easier it is to locate what is needed when our dresser drawers, closets, and kitchens are organized with similar items together. "Isn't that how Wal-Mart® and Target® arrange their merchandise?" I asked. "Wouldn't it be nice to find socks in a sock stack, pots in the kitchen pot section, and comic books in the comic book section? Would you ever look for a fishing pole in the pajama department? Would Nintendo® games be in the cereal and oatmeal section?"

Schlessinger Media® offers a great

Question: Teachers are requesting informational books addressing African-American history. What new titles do you suggest?

Answer: For the teacher who wants to share factual information in a storybook format, suggest Doreen Rappaport's *The School Is Not White!: A True Story of the Civil Rights Movement* (Hyperion Books for Children/Disney Publishing Worldwide, 2005, ISBN: 0786818387). The struggle of the Carter children as the only black students in their 1960s Mississippi school is told through simple text and chalk pastel illustrations.

For a book with photographs, suggest Tonya Bolden's *Maritcha: A Nineteenth-Century American Girl* (Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2005, ISBN: 0810950456). This book takes a look at the Civil War through the eyes of the daughter of a New York City black boarding house owner. Maritcha wanted to attend high school when her family left New York



By Ruth Cox Clark



READER'S Advisory

because of the Draft Riots of 1863; she plead her case before the Rhode Island state legislature to have the law changed in 1866 to allow children of any race or color to attend public school. And, for a little fun, offer Quincey Troupe's picture book biography *Little Stevie Wonder* (Houghton Mifflin, 2005, ISBN: 0618340602), which includes a CD of "Fingertips" and "Uptight (Everything's Alright)" to supplement the lively text and brilliant acrylic illustrations. ■

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video, "Using the Dewey Decimal System." My 3–6 graders all enjoyed it, and many asked to see it again. Even teachers were heard to comment, "I didn't know that." This is a must-have video.

Mr. Dewey, What Were You Thinking?

In lesson #3, we went back to the table piled high with unshelved books. "How could we organize these books so we can find what we need or want when we need it or want it?" I asked my students. A lively, humorous discussion with great opportunities for critical thinking followed. Students could also be asked to write the way they would organize the books in the library media center, allowing them thinking time to come up with a solution. Collaborate with the classroom teachers on this one. They may want to take a grade or give extra credit for this creative example of persuasive writing entitled, "Could You Do Better Than Dewey?" or "How Would You Organize the Library Media Center?" for Grades 3–7 or "What I Like About the Way Mr. Dewey Organized the Library Media Center."

Lesson #4 became "Mrs. Hogsett renames the Dewey categories."

Some of the terms I began to use included:

1. 000–100 Leftover stuff (encyclopedias, almanacs, and stuff that doesn't go anywhere else) and "What does a library media specialist do all day?"
2. 100–199 Strange things; the unusual, maybe true, maybe not; ideas and feelings people have; UFOs and Big Foot have feelings, too!
3. 200–299 Religion, church stuff, and mythology
4. 300–399 Washington, DC, government; how to make, save, and use money; Could I be president? Folktales and scary

stories; and the oft-requested "dragon books"

5. 400–499 Languages from around the world
6. 500–599 Science, weather, outer space, animals, trees, and plants; "Watcha doing for the science fair?"
7. 600–699 How things work; cars and trucks; cookbooks for kids; What will my pet iguana eat for dinner? Hey, Mom, what's for dinner? How to build a robot in 10 easy steps!
8. 700–799 Art, games (sorry, no Nintendos), magic tricks, origami, and sports; What can I do in my spare time? I'm tired of studying.
9. 800–899 Jokes and riddles; Knock, Knocks; poetry
10. 900s Famous people—dead and alive, history, travel, and biographies; What's going on in the rest of the world? Where can I go on spring break? Where's Iraq?

On Another Day of Dewey Fun

I take half a class at a time on a walking tour through the nonfiction, carefully pointing out all the signage for each area, the spine labels with call numbers, and several titles from each section. The other half of the class reads quietly at tables, or works on the Dewey Word Search Handout. As a follow-up, I pass out fun sheets with the Dewey categories listed. I ask the students to write down the title of a book they might find in each section; one they actually checked out or a make-believe one. I'm always telling my students, "Read the signs. I put them up for you." Well-labeled shelving is another must for teaching Dewey.

Visual Learners

Most library media specialists I visited with stressed the importance of some type of visual props in teaching Dewey to students. One library media

specialist cuts out pictures from old magazines and makes posters to hang over the shelves in nonfiction. For instance, over the 300s she would hang a poster of holiday icons, such as pumpkins and Valentine's hearts, dragons, fairy tale characters, currency, and the Capitol building in Washington, DC. Over the 700s would be pictures of footballs, soccer balls, sports paraphernalia, and various artworks. I laminate poems and jokes to hang over the 800s. A great student reward is having his or her poem selected to hang in the 800s. Be sure to save all those library media center catalogs and old magazines, and get students to cut and paste these Dewey "posters." Laminate index cards with Dewey visuals for some great library media center game opportunities. Students love races; when you have prizes, it is even more fun.

Dewey at the Table

Another day place 10 books (one from each Dewey section) on each of the library media center tables. Number each library media center table from 1–10. Working in teams of three, students place the books in Dewey order, select a team spokesperson, and listen for directions. I say, "Table 1, Generalities, I mean, weird, leftover stuff, bring that book from the books on your table and line up in front of the group." "Table 2, Philosophy and Religion, bring that book and line up." When the students and books are in order in front of the class, each spokesperson reads the title of his or her book aloud, along with its call number and Dewey category. This is a 20-minute activity the first time, 10–15 the next time. Then, mix up the table order. "Table 4, bring your book from the 100s." My 4–6 graders enjoy the fast-paced activity while learning the contents and layout of their library media center. I pass out Dewey bookmarks the first time,

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asking that they hold on to these little treasures throughout the year. I subsequently give pencils and other treats if their teamwork, concentration, and cooperation merit. The favorite treat, without a doubt, is to be able to check out an extra book! There are other variations to this learning adventure. It can be simplified or extended. By January, my fifth and sixth graders are required to shelve books from their table before choosing new books. Did I tell you I do NOT have a library assistant?

The Computer Calls

The Internet abounds with creative ways to introduce, explain, and teach Dewey.

How the Dewey Decimal System Works

Duke Libraries, <www.lib.duke.edu/libguide/fi_books_dd.htm>

How to Use the Dewey Decimal System

Monroe County, Indiana Libraries, <www.monroe.lib.in.us/childrens/ddchow.html>

A Story About the Dewey Decimal System of Classification

Arden Druce, *School Library Journal*, February 1961, <www.mte.asd103.org/library/dewey/deweystory.htm>

“Do We” Really Know Dewey?

<<http://tqjunior.thinkquest.org/5002/?tqskip=1>>

Kids Click (web search for kids by librarians)

<<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/KidsClick/dewey.html>>

How One Library Pioneer Profoundly Influenced Modern Librarianship

OCLC, <www.oclc.org/dewey/resources/biography/>

The Rap and the Wrap

No discussion of possibilities for teaching Dewey would be complete without the “The Dewey Rap” (Joan McElfresh) <www.mcps.k12.md.us/schools/rica/mediacenter/deweyrap.html>. Buy and play the cassette. Act it out if you like doing that kind of thing. We sure do! Or assign one of the Dewey categories to small groups of students and have them “rap” it out. They will love it, and will at least remember what types of books are in their rap section. This is great for reader’s theater enthusiasts. I also highlight a Dewey Section each month by pulling various books, doing short booktalks, and mentioning their relationships to one another.

I keep all of my “teaching Dewey” ideas in a file. A favorite reference of mine is *A Guidebook for Teaching Library Skills; Book 2* by Beck and Pace (T.S. Denison, 1965). Fellow library media specialists are the greatest resource! I never tire of teaching Dewey, and I’ve found that as long as I’m having fun with books, my students “dewey,” too! ■

WORK CITED

Wiegand, Wayne. *Irrepressible Reformer*. Chicago: American Library Association, 1996.

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